



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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Atlanta, Georgia 30303

IN REPLY REFER TO:
SER-PC

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Cape Lookout National Seashore

From: *[Signature]* Regional Director, Southeast Region *[Signature]*

Subject: *[Signature]* Finding of No Significant Impact, Commercial Services
Plan/Environmental Assessment, Cape Lookout National Seashore

The Finding of No Significant Impact for the Commercial Services Plan/Environmental Assessment, Cape Lookout National Seashore, is approved.

Attachment

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
COMMERCIAL SERVICES PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT/ASSESSMENT OF EFFECT

CAPE LOOKOUT NATIONAL SEASHORE
CARTERET COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

In conformance with the National Park Service Concessions Management Improvement Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-391) and other laws and policies, the National Park Service (NPS) has prepared a *Commercial Services Plan* to provide guidance for NPS managers to authorize and implement the actions necessary to conduct commercial visitor services at Cape Lookout National Seashore. An Environmental Assessment (EA)/Assessment of Effect were prepared in conjunction with the plan to evaluate the associated impacts anticipated to occur from implementation of the plan alternatives. Actions proposed by the selected alternative have been assessed to ensure that the commercial visitor services and support facilities provided at the national seashore are necessary and appropriate for public use and enjoyment, are consistent to the highest practicable degree with the preservation and conservation of the national seashore's resources and values and purposes. Generally, the NPS must provide a reasonable opportunity for a net profit to concessioners considering various aspects of the concession opportunity. As the NPS moves forward in developing the concession opportunities identified in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), it will ensure this requirement is met. The *Commercial Services Plan* has also identified the need for the NPS to ensure long-term visitor access to seashore transportation services, in part by securing appropriate mainland departure sites.

The appropriate level and number of commercial operations will be determined and authorized under concessions contracts and/or commercial use authorizations. Actions considered by the *Commercial Services Plan* may include new services and/or improvements to existing services to achieve future goals for the national seashore. The approved plan will guide the management of commercial services over approximately the next 10 years. This FONSI has been prepared to document the NPS finding that implementation of the selected alternative from the *Commercial Services Plan* will not have a significant effect on the human environment, and no major environmental impacts are foreseen.

Existing commercial visitor services at the national seashore include services provided through two concession contracts for passenger and vehicle ferry service between: (1) the mainland at Atlantic, North Carolina, and Long Point on North Core Banks, and (2) between the mainland at Davis, North Carolina, and Great Island on South Core Banks.¹ These contracts have also included the operation of overnight cabin accommodations and gas/convenience item sales at the Long Point and Great Island camps.² The concessions contracts expired some time ago, and until recently both concessions were operating under 1-year continuation of services letters. The Davis to Great island concession operated under a 3-year temporary concessions contract from 2005 until 2007. This concessions contract expired December 31, 2007, and the vehicle and passenger ferry service is currently provided on an interim basis under a commercial use authorization (until a long-term concessions contract is completed and issued.)

Additional Commercial Use Authorizations (CUAs) are currently issued for passenger ferry (only) service to the national seashore--four ferries operate from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout lighthouse area and

¹ As of 5/5/2008, the vehicle ferry service from Davis, North Carolina, to Great Island is operated on an interim basis by the Davis Shore Ferry Service under a commercial use authorization.

² As of 5/5/2008, the National Park Service is operating the lodging services at Great Island Camp on an interim basis.

Shackleford Banks, three ferries operate from Beaufort to the lighthouse area and Shackleford Banks, one operates from Ocracoke to Portsmouth Village, and one operates from Morehead City to Shackleford Banks and the lighthouse area. Most of the ferry operations currently authorized by the NPS under CUAs are inconsistent with the requirements and limitations of the law governing such authorizations. The NPS must evaluate these CUAs, and where needed, develop and use appropriate authorizations (such as concessions contracts) that are consistent with the revenue generated and types of services that these ferries provide.

A variety of other commercial services are or have also been authorized under CUAs, including guided recreational and educational activities, land transportation and shuttle services on the islands, and kayak rentals. A moratorium issued in 2004 on additional CUAs will remain in place until the *Commercial Services Plan* is completed.

The *Commercial Services Plan* is consistent with the purpose of the national seashore to conserve and preserve for public use and enjoyment the outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values of a dynamic coastal barrier island environment. It is also consistent with the objectives of the national seashore's 1982 *General Management Plan (GMP)* with regard to the following:

- resource management (i.e., to maintain the seashore in a natural condition, conduct needed basic research, and preserve significant resources)
- visitor use and interpretation (i.e., to provide visitors with interpretation of, and access to, seashore resources in a fashion that avoids or limits environmental impacts)
- and development (i.e., to limit Outer Banks facilities to those that are essential for visitor use, safety, and resource management, with primary facility development reserved for the mainland unit of the national seashore)

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The selected alternative (alternative B) is the preferred alternative from the *Commercial Services Plan*. Additionally, some elements from alternative C have been incorporated into the selected alternative (see below). Under the selected alternative, the NPS will improve the management and operation of commercial services while sustaining a rustic and mostly unstructured visitor experience. The natural and undeveloped character of the national seashore will be maintained. Land and water transportation services will be expanded to enhance visitor exploration throughout the national seashore, and visitors will have more opportunities for education about the national seashore and awareness of its resources. As necessary and appropriate, additional services, such as kayak rentals, will be provided at existing arrival locations, and limited support facilities may be constructed to accommodate those services. Alternatively where feasible, some support facilities may be constructed/provided at federally owned or leased departure facilities. Current opportunities will remain for those seeking solitude and self-directed activities, and a diverse range of other facilitated activities will be provided that perhaps incorporate concession-guided services (e.g., special events, cultural demonstrations, kayak tours, nighttime hikes, and lighthouse and historic district tours) in addition to traditional interpretive programs offered by the national seashore.

The following items from alternative C of the *Commercial Services Plan* have been incorporated into the selected alternative (B):

- The number and diversity of educational and guided services/tours will be increased over current levels to allow visitors to experience more of the seashore in both structured and unstructured contexts.
- Reserved ferry service may be provided to facilitate specialized activities such as eco-tours focusing on particular areas or resources of the national seashore.

- The possibility of overnight use at Portsmouth Village Historic District will be explored under a future planning effort.
- Packaged food items, groceries, and camp and fishing supplies will be available for purchase at the concession lodging areas.
- Facilities to accommodate increased visitation or other operational needs may be considered. When feasible, facilities constructed as a result of this plan will be built near existing visitor activity locations and outside the historic districts, or at mainland departure facilities.

Visitor Ferry Access

Under one or more commercial services instruments, vehicle and passenger ferries will operate from locations at or near Atlantic, North Carolina, to Long Point on North Core Banks, and at or near Davis, North Carolina, to Great Island on South Core Banks.

Under one or more commercial services instruments, passenger ferries will operate from mainland docks on the following routes: from Ocracoke to Portsmouth Village (North Core Banks); from the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area (South Core Banks); and from either Morehead City or Beaufort to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area. Improvements at the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin will enable Harkers Island passenger ferry departures to be consolidated at this location for one or more commercial ferry operators and provide private boaters with short-term moorage while going to the visitor center.

An additional passenger ferry route could be authorized to shorten the travel time to Portsmouth Village from a Down East location such as Cedar Island.

More consistent departure schedules will be established for all ferry services. Although ferries will typically operate from March 15th to December 31st, service may be expanded to include extended summer hours of operation, more daily trips, and extended passenger only operations into off-season periods under a reservation system. The long-term future use and management of Off-Road Vehicles (ORV), including winter use, will be addressed by the ongoing *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan*. Visitor ferry transportation may be provided between the barrier islands on a reservation basis to enhance opportunities for visitors to have linked access throughout the barrier island chain. This would also facilitate the national seashore serving as a spur route of the North Carolina Mountains to Sea Trail. Ferries capable of accommodating large groups (up to 150 passengers at a time) will also be brought into service as feasible, with departures from whatever mainland location is determined most appropriate (e.g., Morehead City or Beaufort, and the Harkers Island boat basin).

Land Transportation on the Islands

Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours may be authorized at the Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts, and originating from the north end of North Core Banks, Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area. Vehicle transportation services based out of the Long Point and Great Island concession lodging areas may be available on a reservation basis to all approved areas on North and South Core Banks. Regularly scheduled vehicle transportation will be provided from the lighthouse area to the southern tip of Cape Lookout, and to other places on South Core Banks, such as the popular fishing area at the rock jetty, on a limited reservation basis. Visitors will be able to pay for land transportation services on the islands. All commercial land transportation services will be governed by the *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan*, which is anticipated to be completed in 2010.

Efforts to enhance the visitor experience and reduce congestion (particularly in the lighthouse area) could occur by implementing operational improvements (such as consolidating land and ferry services under

one or more concessions contracts), ensuring better coordination between ferry and land transportation services, and providing more direct NPS oversight of operations. Consistent with the ongoing *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan*, access will remain available for private vehicles transported by commercial ferries to the barrier islands.

Other Commercial Services

Rustic overnight lodging will continue to be available at Long Point (currently 20 cabins) and at Great Island (currently 25 cabins). As proposed by the *Cape Lookout Village Historic Structures Reuse Implementation Plan* (NPS 2007), all contributing structures in the Cape Lookout Village Historic District will be stabilized. Of these, a minimum of eight structures will be used for overnight visitor stays under a concessions operation. As proposed in alternative C of the *Commercial Services Plan* and incorporated into alternative B, the NPS will explore the possibility of overnight visitor lodging use at the Portsmouth Village Historic District under a future planning effort.

Limited visitor supplies (e.g., water, ice, fuel, and insect repellent) will remain available at the lighthouse visitor center area and the Long Point and Great Island concession lodging areas. In addition, drink and snack items could be provided and would be discretely located at the Portsmouth Village Historic District; at the Cape Lookout Village Historic District; and at Long Point, Great Island, and the lighthouse area. As proposed in alternative C and incorporated into alternative B, packaged food items, grocery and convenience items, may also be provided at current and future concession lodging areas (such as Long Point and Great Island).

Guided services provided by commercial operators (e.g., hunting and fishing services, environmental tours, and chartered fishing and sailing excursions) will continue to be offered, but with enhanced NPS oversight. Kayak rentals on the islands will be authorized to facilitate visitor exploration of the national seashore's soundside waters. Day-use and concession-operated overnight visitation will occur in the Cape Lookout Village Historic District, and day-use visitation will continue at the Portsmouth Village Historic District.

As proposed in alternative C and incorporated into alternative B, the NPS could increase the number and diversity of educational and guided services/tours over current levels to allow visitors to experience more of the seashore in both structured and unstructured contexts. In addition, the NPS could provide or authorize reserved ferry service to facilitate specialized activities such as eco-tours focusing on particular areas or resources of the national seashore. Such services may originate locally or from other more remote locations.

Structures and facilities on the islands adapted for large group activities will consist of those near the Cape Lookout Village Historic District that are used by nonprofit organizations for environmental education. The Life-Saving Station at the Portsmouth Village Historic District and the nearby airfield will also continue to be used for events such as the biennial "Homecoming" events which draw large numbers of attendees.

Commercial Service Locations

The NPS facilities supporting public use, commercial services, and NPS operations will be located at the Portsmouth Village Historic District, Long Point, Great Island, the lighthouse area and Cape Lookout Village Historic District, Shackleford Banks (dock and associated restrooms at the jetty and a restroom at Wade Shores), and the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin.

To secure long-term availability of mainland departure facilities and continued visitor access to the national seashore, the NPS will explore options for acquiring departure facilities at Ocracoke, near Cedar Island, at or near Atlantic and Davis, and at Beaufort or Morehead City. As an alternative to Federal acquisition, the NPS will also explore entering into partnerships with other public/governmental agencies for long-term dock use and access at the above locations (for example a partnership with the North Carolina Maritime Museum may be solicited to locate Beaufort/Morehead City ferries at the Maritime Museum Gallants Channel Annex). If public docking facilities cannot be feasibly secured or are unavailable at desired mainland departure locations, either through acquisition and/or long-term partnerships, the NPS may authorize the use of private facilities.

Resource Protection

Natural and cultural resource management will follow existing NPS policies for research, inventory, monitoring, and treatment. Natural resource management will emphasize protection and rehabilitation of sensitive species and ecosystems and water resources. Cultural resource management will emphasize protection and preservation of national-register-listed or -eligible properties, such as the Cape Lookout Village Historic District and Portsmouth Village Historic District, through adaptive reuse. The NPS staff will provide comprehensive training of concessions operators to improve resource protection efforts. Enhanced visitor education and interpretation will be used to complement resource protection strategies along with increased monitoring and ranger patrols.

National Seashore Operations/Facilities

Existing facilities will be maintained and improved/adapted as necessary with limited new facility construction at current arrival locations to support projected visitor demands for transportation, rental services, and sales of supplies. The NPS will also ensure that all new visitor use facilities or improvements to existing facilities are carried out in accordance with the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards. The Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin and docks will be improved / expanded to accommodate NPS administrative uses and commercial ferry departures. As currently approved, at least eight structures in the Cape Lookout Village Historic District will be rehabilitated to accommodate overnight visitor accommodations through a concessions operation. The NPS will institute measures to ensure quality control of commercial operations, including departure locations and routes.

The NPS will continue to provide public dump stations at locations such as Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area, and may continue to provide vehicle parking/storage lots at the Long Point and Great Island lodging areas and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area in accordance with the ongoing *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan*.

The appropriate level and number of commercial operations will be determined and authorized under concessions contracts and/or commercial use authorizations. At mainland departure locations, permanent restrooms meeting NPS standards, information and literature regarding the national seashore, and adequate parking as feasible will be provided. An increase in NPS personnel (e.g., maintenance, interpretation, law enforcement, and commercial services management) will be required commensurate with the expanded level of commercial operations and visitor use.

Interpretation/Education/Orientation

The current scope of NPS visitor interpretive programs and activities will continue, including natural history programs and talks and scheduled tours of historic sites and structures. Environmental education programs administered by nonprofit organizations will continue to be offered in or near the Cape Lookout Village Historic District area. Commercial service operators could assist NPS interpretive activities by

providing in-depth visitor programs on topics such as the seashore's natural and cultural history. The NPS will ensure that commercial operators provide visitors with consistent and approved interpretive information, orientation, and literature. The NPS will also increase its oversight of commercial operations, in part by requiring operators to receive NPS-provided training and by regularly evaluating operator performance. Enhanced visitor orientation will occur by increasing the NPS presence at mainland ferry departure points and by coordinating visitor departures from the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin with prior orientation at the visitor center.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative (B, described above) the *Commercial Services Plan* analyzed a no-action alternative (A), and one other action alternative (C). The no-action alternative would retain the current scope and level of commercial visitor services without substantial modification. Alternative C would provide visitors with the highest level of in-depth and diverse experiences with emphasis on facilitated group tours and activities. It would also entail a slightly greater degree of facility development in support of commercial services than in alternative B. Several actions proposed for alternative C are the same as for alternative B (e.g., improvements to ferry service operations/management and measures to improve visitor orientation and disperse access to the national seashore).

The following actions are specific to alternative C and represent the principal differences in comparison with alternative B:

- Improve dock or mooring access for private boats at Great Island, Long Point, and near the lighthouse.
- Provide rental of low-impact vehicles for individual use at Long Point, Great Island, and at the lighthouse area.
- Rehabilitate the former gun club to accommodate school groups, nonprofit environmental education organizations, and other appropriate functions.
- Provide limited concession-guided low-impact vehicle tour operations based from Long Point and Great Island concession lodging areas on a scheduled basis.

The planning team evaluated the alternatives using a process called "Choosing by Advantages" (CBA) to identify and compare the relative advantages of each alternative according to a set of criteria derived from the primary issues and impact topics. Alternatives were evaluated to determine how well they would maximize: (1) the diversity of transportation to and within the national seashore, (2) the diversity of visitor experience, (3) the protection of resources, and (4) the efficiency of operations and use of facilities. The alternatives were rated on attributes relating to each of the above factors, and the advantages of the attributes were compared. Alternative B was selected as the preferred alternative because it had a high number of important advantages, particularly with regard to protection of resources and the efficiency of operations and use of facilities. It therefore achieved the highest score of the alternatives evaluated.

An alternative (originally referred to as "alternative B") was dismissed from further analysis following the CBA evaluation. This alternative was presented in the March 2007 NPS newsletter to the public regarding the *Commercial Services Plan*. The underlying concept of the alternative was to maximize the national seashore's untrammeled environment; limit new development and commercial services beyond what are currently available; and generally provide for a rustic, unstructured visitor experience. The planning team determined that the scope of this alternative was closely aligned with alternative A (the no-action alternative) and therefore did not present substantial or measurable differences in comparison with what is

already occurring or planned for the national seashore. The former alternative B was therefore dismissed from further consideration.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferred alternative is defined by the Council on Environmental Quality as the alternative that best meets the following criteria or objectives, as set out in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Section 101):

- 1) Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
- 2) Ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.
- 3) Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
- 4) Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, whenever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice.
- 5) Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.
- 6) Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

With slight differences, the alternatives similarly fulfill the six criteria by preserving and protecting the national seashore's significant cultural and natural resources while providing for a diverse range of recreational opportunities in a safe and environmentally responsible and sustainable manner. Of all the alternatives, alternative A (no action) best meets criterion No.3 because it entails no or minimal new development in support of commercial services beyond that already underway or planned. Of the action alternatives, alternative B best achieves criteria Nos. 3 and 4 because it entails comparably less development and associated environmental impacts, with any new or adapted facilities and infrastructure at currently developed activity locations. In contrast with alternative C, alternative B would not adapt the former gun club on South Core Banks for large group activities, and would not permit rental of low-impact vehicles for individual visitor use. Although this would represent a minor decrease in visitor use opportunities compared with alternative C, the NPS would be able to better protect resources under supervised group vehicle tours, and would not incur the additional challenges of adapting and maintaining the gun club building (such as the expense of cleaning up a fuel spill.).

Alternative B, by emphasizing the retention of the national seashore's natural and undeveloped character and largely rustic visitor experiences, also best meets criteria #2 and #5. The aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings of the national seashore would best be preserved and enhanced with minimal new development in support of commercial services. Alternative B also presents a more balanced approach to accommodating improvements to visitor use and access while preserving important natural and cultural resources.

As evaluated in the *Commercial Services Plan*, the preferred alternative (B) is the environmentally preferred alternative. The incorporation of some elements of alternative C into the selected alternative B (i.e., increasing the number and diversity of educational and guided services and tours; providing reserved ferry service to facilitate specialized activities such as eco-tours; exploring the possibility of overnight use at Portsmouth Village Historic District under a future planning effort; and providing packaged food items, groceries, and camp/fishing supplies at concession lodging areas) does not alter the previous determination that alternative B best addresses the six criteria presented in the NEPA (Section 101), and is therefore the environmentally preferred alternative.

WHY THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

As defined in 40 CFR Section 1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Impacts That May Be Both Beneficial And Adverse

Visitor use and experience

Long-term beneficial impacts will occur on visitor use and experience because of expanded access throughout the national seashore, the diversity of recreational opportunities available to visitors, and operational and interpretive improvements. Visitors will benefit from enhanced opportunities to access the barrier islands from a variety of departure points with more consistent and expanded ferry departure schedules. In addition to a diverse range of activities that could be facilitated by concession-guided services, visitors will continue to have opportunities for self-directed exploration and solitude. Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours may be provided in the Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts and will also originate from the north end of North Core Banks, Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area. Scheduled and reserved vehicle tour/shuttle services will also be provided. Kayaks could be rented on the islands. Opportunities for chartered fishing and sailboat excursions and other guided activities will be increased.

The operational efficiencies expected from combining some commercial use authorizations into a fewer number of contracts will also benefit visitors by generally facilitating more consistent and expanded services. These services include reestablishing seasonal land transportation from the lighthouse dock to Cape Point and the fishing beach at the rock jetty, and permitting the operation of larger ferries that can accommodate large groups with greater safety and visitor comfort.

Rustic overnight lodging will remain at Long Point and Great Island. In conformance with the *Cape Lookout Village Historic Structures Reuse Implementation Plan* (NPS 2007), visitors will also have opportunities for overnight/extended stays in rehabilitated historic structures in the Cape Lookout Village Historic District, and future planning will determine if rustic lodging is appropriate and feasible for Portsmouth Village. Supplies for purchase will be available at the lighthouse visitor center and concession lodging areas (such as the Long Point and Great Island camps). Discretely-placed vending machines could be provided. The availability of these supplies will add to visitor comfort and enable visitors (particularly those unprepared for their visit) to better cope with the undeveloped nature and sometimes harsh and/or unpredictable conditions of the Outer Banks.

At existing locations on the islands, facilities will be improved or new construction will be undertaken as necessary to accommodate transportation and rental services, sales of supplies, etc. Construction activities could potentially introduce visual and atmospheric intrusions that could affect views, vistas, and the quality of the visitor experience during the period of construction. Construction will be scheduled to minimize conflicts with high visitation periods. Consequently, these adverse impacts will be minor and localized and will last only as long as the period of construction.

The NPS will improve coordination among commercial ferry and land transportation operations to reduce visitor congestion at the island arrival locations, particularly in the lighthouse area. Upon arrival, visitors will have increased opportunities to disperse, facilitated by linked, readily available land transportation and rental services. The long-term future use and management of ORV will be addressed by the ongoing *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan*.

The NPS ranger-led interpretive activities and other educational programs will continue. The NPS will increase its oversight and training of commercial service providers to ensure that visitors receive orientation and interpretation that is consistent with NPS standards and objectives. As feasible, provision of adequate visitor parking near the ferry dock locations on the mainland will contribute to visitor convenience. Enhanced visitor orientation will occur with an increased NPS presence at these mainland dock locations. Improvements to the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin and docks will permit ferry operators to depart from that location. This will allow visitors to receive orientation information at the visitor center before departing to the islands.

Visitor interpretation, health, and safety will be enhanced by additional NPS staff hired to facilitate commercial operations. Existing environmental education programs administered by nonprofit organizations will be accommodated in or near the Cape Lookout Village Historic District, and concessions operators could further assist the NPS in providing in-depth interpretive programs. These measures will better equip visitors to explore more of the national seashore and will enhance their understanding and appreciation of the national seashore's resources and recreational opportunities.

Cultural resources

No new facility construction will occur within the Cape Lookout Village or Portsmouth Village historic districts in support of commercial services beyond that proposed or that may be proposed under other plans.

Guided low-impact vehicle tours of the Portsmouth Village and the Cape Lookout Village historic districts may be provided. Tour visitors and other day-use visitors will receive interpretation of the preserved structures and cultural landscapes. Expanded and enhanced transportation opportunities will be expected to bring more visitors into the historic districts in comparison with alternative A (no action). Consequently, NPS staff and the tour guides will augment resource protection efforts to monitor visitor use and ensure that increasing visitation levels and patterns of use do not adversely affect historic building fabric or other character-defining qualities of the historic districts and their contributing cultural landscapes (e.g., historic paths/roads, vegetation, and spatial arrangement of structures and features). Enhanced NPS education / interpretative programs and outreach will also assist efforts to inform visitors of the importance of protecting cultural resources.

As part of ongoing historic preservation activities, NPS staff will continue to stabilize, rehabilitate, and restore buildings and structures contributing to the significance of the historic districts within the national seashore. All preservation treatments will be carried out in accordance with NPS policies and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Any adverse impacts will be long term but negligible in intensity.

There will be few, if any, adverse impacts on historic structures and cultural landscapes. Any adverse impacts will be negligible to minor and long term. After applying the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's criteria of adverse effect (36 CFR Part 800.5, *Assessment of Adverse Effects*), NPS staff concludes that implementation of the selected alternative will result in *no adverse effect* to national-register-eligible or -listed buildings, structures, and cultural landscape features at the national seashore. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with the NPS finding of *no adverse effect* for the selected alternative in a letter dated November 28, 2007.

Natural resources (wildlife)

In comparison with alternative A, the selected alternative will have increased impacts on wildlife and habitats because more visitors will be able to disperse over a wider area of the national seashore. Wildlife could be disturbed and displaced by commercial vehicles traveling over a larger area, but the long-term adverse impacts will be negligible because vehicles will continue to use existing transportation routes.

Harassment of wildlife, whether intentional or unintentional, could also occur as visitors more widely disperse resulting in moderate long-term adverse impacts. These impacts would vary by species.

Although additional low-impact vehicle tours will be available, visitors will be with tour guides familiar with the national seashore's regulations and requirements. Requiring commercial service operators to provide their clients with appropriate orientation stressing the importance of resource stewardship will reduce the level of impact. The impacts on wildlife will therefore be adverse but negligible in the long term.

Visitors currently bring their own food and water to the national seashore and are asked to take all refuse with them when they leave. Under the selected alternative, it will be possible for visitors to purchase food items and convenience items on the islands, which could result in increased availability of food for scavengers. Some wildlife species might become habituated to humans and their food and become pests. These behaviors could adversely affect the health of these species. To mitigate the adverse impacts on wildlife, NPS staff will increase public outreach (e.g., educational/interpretive programs and materials) to ensure that visitors remove their trash. The long-term adverse impacts on wildlife associated with the increased availability of food on the national seashore will be negligible to minor.

Limited additional facilities and infrastructure could be developed to provide storage space for the equipment (e.g., kayaks and low-impact vehicles) provided by commercial service operators. Other facilities could be considered to accommodate increased visitation or other operational needs. These facilities will be constructed near existing visitor activity locations or at mainland departure facilities, when feasible. Facility construction might result in the loss of habitat, displacement, or mortality of some individuals. To mitigate these impacts, NPS staff will, to the extent practicable, restrict development to areas that have been previously disturbed and will schedule construction to avoid seasons when species are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. With these measures, the short- and long-term adverse impacts on wildlife associated with developing additional facilities will be negligible to minor.

The extent of the potential impacts associated with additional visitor activities will vary by the location of tours, the time of year, and the particular species potentially impacted. The type, route, and timing of activities and tours will be established to allow visitors to experience resources or see wildlife with the least impact. Because visitors will be participating in organized tours accompanied by tour guides, the potential for adverse impacts will be small. The long-term adverse impacts on wildlife from the increased number of tours available to visitors will be negligible.

The NPS will consider expanding the hours ferry service will be available to allow visitors to arrive earlier and stay later at the national seashore. Many species are more active in the early morning and early evening hours when there are currently fewer visitors. With expanded hours of operation more visitors might be at the national seashore during the morning and evening hours. However, the number of visitors who would take advantage of the expanded hours is likely to be relatively small. Most of these visitors will be concentrated in the primary visitor use areas or will be participating in tours. For these reasons the impact on wildlife from extended hours of ferry service will be adverse but negligible to minor in the long term.

Socioeconomic environment

The national seashore will remain a primary visitor destination and a key component of the regional tourism industry. Under contracts and CUAs, commercial visitor service providers will continue to offer goods and services necessary for visitor safety and enjoyment. Expanded access and improved/diverse recreational activities could attract more visitors to the national seashore, and visitor expenditures will have long-term beneficial impacts on local and regional economies.

Commercial service providers and their employees will benefit by having long-term contracts with the NPS. These businesses will be in a more stable position to make long-term investments to support capital improvements. Most private employment opportunities will remain seasonal, but employers and employees could make long-term plans to return year after year. Facilities serving the public will also be enhanced with the one-time costs of physical improvements borne by the NPS and private concessioners as part of their contracts. Local and regional expenditures will be short term, with beneficial impacts mostly affecting the construction industry.

Limiting and/or geographically grouping similar services into fewer concession contracts will also contribute to improved visitor services. By eliminating duplicate services at the same general location (i.e., four separate services operating from Harkers Island) and offering a variety of services at consolidated locations, commercial service providers will benefit from economies of scale regarding labor and administrative costs. At the local level, profits will accrue for these providers, and there will be steadier seasonal employment with more reliable employee wages and salaries. Improved levels of service could result in increased visitation to the seashore, with a corresponding benefit to the economy. However, there would be adverse impacts on firms not successful in winning contracts.

NPS operations and facilities

Some limited facility improvements and new construction may be required to support commercial services. As necessary, NPS staff will also retrofit or construct new docks to accommodate visitors with limited mobility. The NPS will ensure that appropriate future compliance is carried out for these construction actions in accordance with the NEPA and other laws and policies. Because commercially provided transportation services on the islands will operate on a more frequent basis and cover a larger area of the national seashore, there will also be an increased need for maintaining the unpaved sand roads on the islands. Land transportation services will run more frequently but will remain a small fraction of the total use of the roads. The adverse impacts associated with these actions will be negligible to minor in both the short and long terms.

The NPS staff will be able to more effectively manage and coordinate commercial operations if the overall number of commercial service providers is reduced. Uniform reporting requirements and monitoring of commercial service operator performance will be instituted. If some CUAs were converted to contracts, NPS staff will have additional revenue to offset maintenance and other costs associated with use of facilities at the national seashore by commercial operators and visitors. These actions will have long-term benefits on NPS operations.

To fully implement the selected alternative, additional NPS staff will be needed for interpretation, law enforcement, and concessions management. Additional interpretive staff will allow more time to provide interpretive training to commercial service operators without compromising current interpretive programs. Additional funding for more law enforcement staff will allow for increased monitoring and enforcement activities throughout the national seashore. Consolidating concessions management responsibilities will reduce the amount of coordination necessary to efficiently and effectively run the program. The additional staff will provide a long-term benefit to NPS operations.

There will be an increased need for NPS natural and cultural resource monitoring and enforcement activities because visitors will be able to disperse over a larger area of the national seashore. In addition, visitors participating in low-impact vehicle tours will be accompanied by trained guides familiar with NPS regulations which will reduce the possibility of visitors adversely impacting resources. Commercial service providers will be required to attend interpretive training provided by NPS staff. This will enable commercial service providers to give visitors appropriate advance orientation and interpretive information that meets NPS standards. There will be a short-term minor adverse impact on NPS staffing associated with these operational changes because of the time necessary to develop programs and provide training.

In the long term, the impact on operations will be adverse but negligible because of the efficiencies associated with these changes.

The number and type of commercial service operations will change over the long term, with revenues expected from commercial operations to increase over time. Eighty percent of franchise fees will be retained by the national seashore for visitor services and resource protection projects. This revenue will contribute to projects that will offset some of the adverse impacts on operations associated with commercial services. The increase in revenue for visitor services and resource protection projects will have a long-term beneficial impact on operations at the national seashore.

Other Considerations

Degree of effect on public health or safety

No direct adverse effects are anticipated on public health and safety as a result of actions proposed by the selected alternative. Although visitors will have expanded opportunities to disperse throughout the national seashore, visitor safety will be enhanced by improved orientation and supervision provided by the NPS and commercial service operators. The availability of supplies for purchase on the islands (e.g., water, fuel, insect repellent, food items) will add to visitor comfort and allow unprepared visitors to better cope with unpredictable conditions. Additional NPS staff hired to facilitate commercial operations will also be a benefit to visitor health and safety.

Any construction carried out in support of commercial service operations will be in accordance with approved safety standards and guidelines, and consequently no direct adverse effects are anticipated on public health and safety during the construction period. As presented in the mitigation measures of the *Commercial Services Plan*, construction zones will be clearly delineated to confine activity to the minimum areas required. Workers will be adequately informed of all safety and resource protection measures, and these will be clearly identified in the construction specifications. Increases in exhaust emissions, dust, and noise could occur if heavy equipment is required during construction. However, the adverse impacts resulting from these activities will be short term and localized. Negligible adverse impacts on public health and safety are therefore anticipated from construction noise and emissions.

Visitors will be provided advance notification of proposed construction and will be directed away from construction areas and equipment to avoid safety hazards and minimize visitor use conflicts. The NPS will also ensure that all new visitor use facilities or improvements to existing facilities are carried out in accordance with the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas

The dynamic coastal environment of the Outer Banks has been dramatically shaped by prevailing winds, storms, tides, and the littoral drift of sand along the shorelines. The Outer Banks were created by sand deposition and are constantly in motion, generally moving in a southwesterly direction towards the mainland. Storm overwash typically results in sand from the eastern (ocean) side of the islands being redeposited on the western (sound) side. In some locations, salt marshes fringe low lying areas on the sound side.

All but the tallest dunes at the national seashore are within the 100-year floodplain and the coastal high hazard area. Some areas receive a degree of protection from winds and storm surges by the dune system that parallels the shoreline along the Atlantic side of the cape. In March 2005, the Army Corps of Engineers delineated wetlands in the vicinity of the Cape Lookout Village Historic District. Future

compliance may be required for potential impacts on floodplains and wetlands pending future site-specific designs for new construction carried out to support commercial service operations. All construction undertakings will be designed to minimize adverse impacts on wetlands, floodplain processes, and potential risks to life and property. There are no prime farmlands or wild and scenic rivers at the national seashore. No threatened and endangered species or ecologically critical areas will be affected by actions proposed under the selected alternative.

The national seashore protects two historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Cape Lookout Village Historic District consists of historic buildings and structures clustered in three primary areas: (1) the lighthouse complex at the northern end of the district includes the 1859 Cape Lookout Lighthouse, 1873 Keepers' Quarters, and other structures; (2) the U.S. Coast Guard Station Complex, developed about 1916 on the site of the earlier 1887 Life-Saving Station at the southern end of the district; and (3) the central residential area of former private dwellings constructed between about 1915 and 1950. The cultural landscape of the historic district has been thoroughly documented and is identified as a contributing component of the district's NRHP significance.

The Portsmouth Village Historic District, located at the northern tip of the national seashore, was originally the site of a trans-shipment port for ships passing through Ocracoke Inlet. A U.S. Life-Saving Station was established there in the 1890s, and Portsmouth also became a popular summer vacation destination. Some of the historic buildings (the visitor center – Dixon/Salter House, the Methodist Church, school, post office/general store, and the life-saving station) are open to the public, and some of the former houses are leased to individuals for seasonal use. Despite its long history, the district's cultural landscape primarily reflects its appearance as it has evolved over the first half of the 20th century.

As previously noted in this FONSI (*cultural resources*, pages 9-10), any adverse impacts on the historic districts from actions proposed by the selected alternative will be negligible to minor in the long term.

Degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

There were no highly controversial effects identified during either preparation of the *Commercial Services Plan* or the public review period.

Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified during either preparation of the *Commercial Services Plan* or the public review period.

Degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The selected alternative neither establishes an NPS precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

Other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions were analyzed for the potential to contribute to cumulative impacts in association with implementation of the selected alternative. Actions potentially contributing to cumulative impacts include: (1) rehabilitation and adaptive use of historic structures in the Cape Lookout Village Historic District, including public overnight lodging under a concessions operation; (2) ongoing rehabilitation of the lighthouse and planned opening of the structure for daily visitation; (3) protection of the lighthouse and associated structures from shoreline erosion (completed in 2006); (4) implementation of selected treatment

recommendations presented in the cultural landscape reports for the Cape Lookout Village and Portsmouth Village historic districts; (5) visitor use and orientation improvements in the vicinity of the lighthouse including a new comfort station and visitor contact station, public parking area, and new sections of boardwalk (completed in 2006-2007); (6) management of threatened and endangered species through the *Interim Protected Species Management Plan* (2006); (7) implementation of the ongoing *Off-Road Vehicle Management Plan* that will assist NPS management and regulation of private ORV on the barrier islands as well as commercially-operated and/or provided vehicles for transportation and guided tours; and (8) improvements proposed by the 2001 *GMP Amendment* for overnight accommodations and transportation services to North and South Core Banks.

Implementation of the above actions, in conjunction with the impacts of the selected alternative, will have long-term beneficial cumulative impacts on visitor use and experience. Visitors will benefit by a variety of proposed measures to expand opportunities for recreational and educational experiences at the national seashore. Long-term negligible to minor adverse cumulative impacts will occur to the Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts, and the selected alternative's contribution to potential impacts on historic properties will be small. Long-term negligible to minor adverse cumulative impacts on wildlife are also anticipated from implementation of the selected alternative in conjunction with the adverse impacts associated primarily with ORV use and visitor use and occupancy of the Cape Lookout Village Historic District. Appropriate mitigation measures will be used to reduce the impacts on wildlife, and the selected alternative's contribution to cumulative impacts will be very small.

Long-term beneficial cumulative impacts will occur to the socioeconomic environment as improved visitor services and expanded access contribute to local and regional economies. The cumulative impacts on NPS operations are anticipated to be long term, adverse, and minor to moderate in intensity. This is a consequence of the national seashore staff taking on additional maintenance and other responsibilities associated with commercial visitor services in addition to the requirements associated with ongoing and other planned operational activities. These adverse impacts will be mitigated in part by additional NPS staff hired to facilitate operations.

Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources

Implementation of the selected alternative will have negligible to minor adverse impacts on historic buildings, structures, and cultural landscape features that contribute to the significance of the Cape Lookout Village and Portsmouth Village historic districts. Impacts are anticipated to result primarily from opportunities for increased numbers of visitors, perhaps using low-impact vehicles, to explore the historic districts as part of tour groups. To mitigate these impacts, national seashore staff will enhance resource protection efforts in the historic districts by increasing monitoring, and carrying out public outreach and education stressing the importance of cultural resource protection.

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was completed through consultation with the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, SHPO. This office concurred with the NPS finding that the selected alternative (alternative B) will have *no adverse effect* on the district's historic properties (letter dated November 28, 2007).

Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

The NPS consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources to determine if proposed actions would affect threatened, endangered, or state species of concern. Identified threatened and endangered species at Cape Lookout include the piping plover; loggerhead, leatherback and green sea turtles; and seabeach amaranth (a threatened plant species that grows in dune areas). There are also several State species of concern (i.e., little blue heron, snowy egret, tricolored heron, glossy ibis, gull-billed tern, common tern, least tern, black skimmer, loggerhead shrike, brown pelican, peregrine falcon, Outer Banks king snake, and Carolina diamondback terrapin).

Threatened and endangered species are managed at the national seashore in accordance with the *Interim Protected Species Management Plan* (2006). No actions proposed by the *Commercial Services Plan* will change the management of threatened and endangered species nor result in impacts greater than those already described in the *Interim Protected Species Management Plan*. In a March 3, 2008, personal communication between the USFWS and the NPS Denver Service Center, the USFWS concurred with this assessment and concluded that there was no need for further Section 7 consultations with the NPS with regard to the *Commercial Services Plan*.

Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local environmental protection law

The selected alternative violates no Federal, State, or local environmental protection laws.

IMPAIRMENT OF NATIONAL SEASHORE RESOURCES OR VALUES

In addition to reviewing the list of significance criteria, the superintendent of the national seashore determined that implementation of the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment of the national seashore's resources and values. This conclusion is based on a thorough analysis of the impacts described in the *Commercial Services Plan*, the agency and public comments received, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker in accordance with *NPS Management Policies, 2006*. As described in the *Commercial Services Plan*, implementation of the preferred alternative will not result in major adverse impacts to a resource or value whose conservation is: (1) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of Cape Lookout National Seashore; (2) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the national seashore; or (3) identified as a goal in the national seashore's GMP or other relevant NPS planning documents.

UNACCEPTABLE IMPACTS

As stated in *NPS Management Policies 2006* (Section 1.4.7.1) unacceptable impacts are impacts that fall short of impairment, but are still not acceptable within a park's environment. Park managers must not allow uses that would cause unacceptable impacts; they must evaluate existing or proposed uses and determine whether the associated impacts on park resources and values are acceptable.

For the purposes of NPS policies, unacceptable impacts are impacts that, individually or cumulatively, would:

- be inconsistent with a park's purpose or values; or
- impede the attainment of a park's desired future conditions for natural and cultural resources as identified through the park's planning process; or

- create an unsafe or unhealthful environment for visitors or employees; or
- diminish opportunities for current or future generations to enjoy, learn about, or be inspired by park resources or values; or
- unreasonably interfere with
 - park programs or activities
 - an appropriate use
 - the atmosphere of peace and tranquility, or the natural soundscape maintained in wilderness and natural, historic, or commemorative locations within the park
 - the NPS concessioner operations or services

The selected alternative will not result in any unacceptable impacts on national seashore resources or values. The majority of impacts identified and evaluated during the EA process were either beneficial (i.e., visitor experience, NPS operations) or entailed negligible to moderate adverse effects on natural and cultural resources.

Impacts on wildlife from intentional or unintentional harassment are anticipated to be minor to moderate. However, these potential adverse effects would be somewhat variable in their frequency, location, and duration, and would not be inconsistent with the national seashore's purpose or values or impede the national seashore's attainment of desired future conditions. In addition, these effects would not unreasonably diminish opportunities for enjoyment of national seashore resources or interfere with NPS programs or activities, appropriate uses, the atmosphere of tranquility or natural soundscapes, or NPS concessioner operations or services. Consequently, no unacceptable impacts would occur as a result of implementation of the selected alternative.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

During the preparation of this *Commercial Services Plan* and EA, the NPS consulted with public agencies, organizations, and individuals having a stake in the plan and the future of commercial services at the national seashore.

Staff from the national seashore, NPS Southeast Regional Office, and NPS Denver Service Center held public scoping meetings for the plan in May 2006 in Beaufort and Harkers Island. National seashore, region, and Denver-based staff also conducted work sessions at the national seashore in July 2006 to initiate the development of plan alternatives. The draft alternatives were presented to the public in a March 2007 newsletter, and at two public meetings also held in March 2007. A CBA workshop was subsequently held April 23-24, 2007, to select the preferred alternative. Public comments received on the draft alternatives contributed to the selection of the preferred alternative.

In a March 3, 2008, personal communication between the USFWS and the NPS Denver Service Center, the USFWS noted that the *Commercial Services Plan* would not change the way threatened and endangered species are managed at the national seashore, nor would the plan entail additional impacts on threatened and endangered species. It concluded that there was no need for further Section 7 consultations with the NPS for the *Commercial Services Plan*.

In a memorandum dated December 5, 2007, the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Water Quality (DWQ) indicated that 401 certification from the DWQ may be required if facility construction or expansion associated with the *Commercial Services Plan* could impact wetlands or waters of the state. In a letter dated December 7, 2007, the Division of Coastal Management (DCM) indicated that applicants for commercial services at the national seashore may be required to

submit a consistency certification to the division before the NPS's approval of their operations. The division subsequently issued a finding (December 13, 2007), concurring that the selected alternative (alternative B) of the *Commercial Services Plan* is "consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with the enforceable policies of North Carolina's coastal management program." No other comments were received from State agencies having a regulatory interest in the plan to indicate that the actions proposed by the selected alternative are inconsistent with the State's coastal management program. However, future NPS projects necessary to implement the *Commercial Services Plan* will require DCM consistency review and concurrence prior to implementation.

In a letter dated July 26, 2007, the NPS notified the SHPO about the *Commercial Services Plan* and the intent to evaluate impacts on cultural resources in accordance with the requirements of Section 106 of the NHPA and the NEPA. The SHPO concurred with the NPS finding of *no adverse effect* for the selected alternative in a letter dated November 28, 2007.

A draft of the *Commercial Services Plan* was placed on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment Website for public review. Copies were sent to members of the public requesting the document. The 30-day public review and comment period ended on December 14, 2007, and seven comments were received. Responses to public comments are included in the attached Errata sheets.

CONCLUSION

The selected alternative does not constitute an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement. The selected alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment, and no major environmental impacts are foreseen. There are no significant adverse impacts on public health, public safety, threatened or endangered species, historic properties either listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other unique characteristics of the region. No highly uncertain or controversial impacts, unique or unknown risks, significant cumulative effects, or elements of precedence were identified. Implementation of the action will not violate any federal, state, or local environmental protection law.

Based on the foregoing, it has been determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for this project and thus will not be prepared.

Recommended:

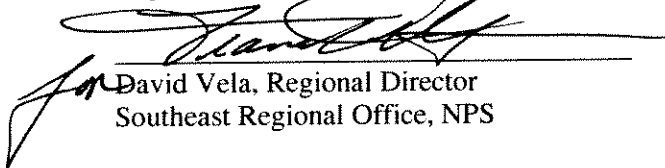


Russel J. Wilson, Superintendent
Cape Lookout National Seashore

9/24/08

Date

Approved:



David Vela, Regional Director
Southeast Regional Office, NPS

10/17/08

Date

ERRATA

The following discussion is provided to amend, correct technical errors, and/or to clarify information provided in the *Commercial Services Plan (CSP)*. A final version of the plan will not be prepared, and therefore inclusion of these changes as part of the "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) represents the final amendments deemed necessary for the purposes of the planning effort.

RESPONSES TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

As presented in the draft *CSP* (page 39), the selected alternative (alternative B) provides for visitor ferry service from multiple mainland dock locations to the barrier islands, including at least one passenger ferry operating between Morehead City and Shackleford Banks. Some of the public comments received on the plan indicated that it is desirable to provide passenger ferry service from Morehead City to the Cape Lookout lighthouse area in addition to Shackleford Banks. The National Park Service (NPS) supports this option and has revised the description under *visitor ferry access* for the selected alternative to note that "passenger ferries will operate from mainland docks on the following routes: from Ocracoke to Portsmouth Village (North Core Banks); from the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area (South Core Banks); and from either Morehead City or Beaufort to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area" (FONSI, page 3). This change will also apply to alternative A (CSP, page 35) and alternative C (CSP, page 41) under *visitor ferry access*.

Some commenters expressed concern that although the draft plan supports the operation of ferries capable of accommodating large groups (up to 150 passengers at a time), that no large ferries are currently in service because of the moratorium on new business permits. The NPS agrees that large capacity ferries provide the most advantageous means of transporting school groups and other large groups to the barrier islands, and supports ferry departures from whatever mainland location is determined most feasible (e.g., Morehead City or Beaufort and the Harkers Island boat basin). This change is noted in the description of the selected alternative provided on page 3 of this FONSI under *visitor ferry access*.

Other commenters expressed concern that commercial services and any associated development could have detrimental impacts on the rustic and natural qualities of the national seashore that they value and that set it apart from other Outer Banks locales. The NPS appreciates this concern, which has been expressed by many since initial public scoping was conducted for the *CSP*. At the core of the plan is a commitment to propose and authorize visitor commercial services that are in conformance with NPS mandates to protect and preserve the national seashore's important natural, cultural, and scenic resources. As emphasized in the overall concept for the selected alternative, the management and operation of commercial services will be improved while sustaining a rustic and mostly unstructured visitor experience. Although ferry and land transportation services will be expanded to enhance visitor exploration throughout the national seashore, the natural, remote character of the national seashore will be maintained.

OTHER PLAN MODIFICATIONS

The draft *CSP* also indicates that under all alternatives, "at least one passenger ferry would operate from **private** mainland docks . . ." (CSP – alternative A, page 35; CSP – alternative B, page 39; CSP – alternative C, page 41; and table 3). The statement "private docks" in the *Commercial Services Plan* (alternative B, page 39; alternative C, page 41; and table 3) has been changed to "docks" for the following reasons. In alternative A it was a correct statement of the existing condition. However the word "private"

was erroneously carried over to alternatives B and C. As noted in the planning issues presented on page 18 of the plan, escalating regional property values could negatively influence the availability of private ferry access points on the mainland. As a consequence, the long-term future availability of privately-owned mainland ferry docking facilities is of particular concern to the NPS.

To help ensure long-term visitor access to the barrier islands, and to facilitate the issuance of contracts/commercial use authorizations and selection of commercial ferry operators, the NPS will explore options for acquiring departure facilities at Ocracoke, near Cedar Island, at or near Atlantic and Davis, and at Beaufort or Morehead City. As an alternative to Federal acquisition, the NPS will also explore entering into partnerships with other public/governmental agencies for long-term dock use and access at the above locations (for example a partnership with the North Carolina Maritime Museum may be solicited to locate Beaufort/Morehead City ferries at the Maritime Museum Gallants Channel Annex). If public docking facilities cannot be feasibly secured or are unavailable at desired mainland departure locations, either through acquisition and/or long-term partnerships, the NPS may authorize the use of private facilities. This change is noted in the description of the selected alternative provided on page 5 of this FONSI under *commercial service locations*, and in the *CSP* under the heading *commercial service locations* for alternative B (*CSP*, page 40) and alternative C (*CSP*, page 43).

The following changes are indicated with regard to land transportation services on the islands. Under alternative A the statement “Concession-guided ATV tours would continue to be provided at Portsmouth Village Historic District” (*CSP*, page 35) will be changed to “Concession-guided ATV tours would continue to be provided originating from the north end of North Core Banks near the Portsmouth Village Historic District.” Under alternative B (the selected alternative) the statement “Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours would be provided at Portsmouth Village” (*CSP*, page 39) has been modified on page 3 of this FONSI to “Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours may be authorized at the Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts, and originating from the north end of North Core Banks, Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area.” Alternative C will also be modified to read “Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours may be provided at the Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts and originating from the north end of North Core Banks, Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area” (*CSP*, page 42).

The alternatives description statements under *other commercial services* indicating that “Commercial hunting and fishing guide services, environmental tours, and chartered fishing and sailing excursions would continue to be offered but with enhanced NPS oversight” (*CSP* – alternative B, page 40; *CSP* – alternative C, page 42) will be clarified as follows: “Guided services provided by commercial operators (e.g., hunting and fishing services, environmental tours, and chartered fishing and sailing excursions) will continue to be offered but with enhanced NPS oversight” (FONSI, page 4).

The changes noted above will be reflected in revisions to table 3 (Summary of Alternatives) of the *CSP* as follows:

Alternative A (*visitor ferry access*, row 1, page 56) — “Operate at least one passenger ferry from mainland docks from Ocracoke to Portsmouth Village; from the Harkers Island Visitor Center boat basin to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area; and from either Beaufort or Morehead City to Shackleford Banks and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area.”

Alternative A (*land transportation on the island*, row 1 page 57) — “Continue to provide concession-guided ATV tours originating from the north end of North Core Banks near the Portsmouth Village Historic District.”

Alternative B (*land transportation on the islands*, row 1, page 57) — “Concession-guided low-impact vehicle tours may be provided at Portsmouth Village and Cape Lookout Village historic districts and add low-impact vehicle tours originating from Long Point, Great Island, and the Cape Lookout lighthouse area.”

Alternative C (*land transportation on the islands*, row 1, page 57) — “Same as alternative B except vehicle transportation from Long Point and Great Island would be on a scheduled basis rather than a reservation basis.”

Alternative B (*commercial services locations*, bottom row, page 59) — Added: “The NPS will explore options for acquiring departure facilities at Ocracoke, near Cedar Island, at or near Atlantic and Davis, and at Beaufort or Morehead City. The National Park Service will also explore the possibility of entering into partnerships with other public / governmental agencies for long-term dock use and access at the above locations. If public docking facilities cannot be feasibly secured or are unavailable at desired mainland departure locations, the National Park Service may authorize the use of private facilities.”

The above changes are expected to result in only a small degree of associated environmental impacts, and will not appreciably alter the impacts previously described in the Environmental Assessment for the CSP, particularly for cultural resources, wildlife, and socioeconomics. The changes are anticipated to contribute to long-term benefits for visitor use and experience in consideration of the NPS’s support of expanded ferry departure locations, use of large capacity ferries, and attempts to secure public ferry docks (or enter into partnerships for dock facilities) to better ensure future visitor access to the national seashore. Acquisition of public dock facilities on the mainland could contribute to minor adverse impacts on national seashore operations as a consequence of added expenditures associated with property acquisition and ongoing maintenance.